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8 February 1968

## THE NORTH VIETNAMESE OFFENSIVE AIR THREAT

### BACKGROUND

- During the past month MIG-21 flights have been conducted in southern North Vietnam (NVN), once as far south as Vinh. A possible ground control intercept (GOI) support facility has been installed in the vicinity of the DMZ and the air defense communications network in southern NVN has been expanded. Positive indications of airfield development or repairs have been noted at Vinh and Bai Thuong. Other jet fighter, jet bomber, and light transport activities suggest that offensive air operations may be planned.

### THE OFFENSIVE AIR THREAT

- The main offensive air threat from NVN consists of about 100 MIG-15/17s, 23 MIG-21s, and 8 IL-28 light jet bombers. Only nine of the MIG-15/17s and seven of the MIG-21s are now in NVN. At least three of the IL-28s are now believed to be in-country and another three are possibly en route. All the remaining fighter and jet bombers are in Communist China but could return to NVN at any time.

- The current MIG and jet light bomber force is not known to have participated in active offensive air operations, but these forces have occasionally conducted bombing practice on a small scale.

- An additional air threat is posed by 22 AN-2 Colt light transports; types which have been used in actual ground attacks in Laos.

- Optimum operating radii measured from bases near Hanoi, with associated munitions loads, are shown at Tabs A and B. Targets farther south could be struck if Vinh and/or Bai Thuong airfields were available.

NSA review completed

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NAVY review(s) completed:

DIA review(s) completed.

MORI/CDF

NIMA Referral Review Completed

USAF review(s) completed.

OSD Review Completed

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US ACTIONS

- All echelons of command have been kept informed of the indications that NVN could be making preparations to exercise its air force in an offensive role.

- Recent photography revealed that Vinh and Bai Thuong airfields were unserviceable. However, on 7 February CINCPAC directed frequent reconnaissance and strikes on Vinh and Bai Thuong airfields, including Destructor MK-36 seedings, to insure that they remain unserviceable. During extended periods of bad weather A-6 aircraft or ground radar controlled air strikes will be conducted to interrupt and harass any enemy repair activity. All units operating in the DMZ or southern part of NVN were alerted to the possibility of offensive MIG-21 operations.

- During the period 1 - 8 February, four NVN airfields, including Vinh and Bai Thuong, were struck six times by a total of 19 aircraft. Due to monsoonal weather, all six strikes were conducted using F-4/F-105 radar controlled drops or A-6 systems run. Results of these strikes are unknown. Four airfields, including Phuoc Yen, Vinh, and Bai Thuong, are scheduled to be struck during the next 24 hours.

- US radar and GCI coverage extends over all but the northeast corner of NVN. Aircraft are continuously on strip alert at all US bases. At Danang, for example, 16 aircraft are maintained on air defense strip alert. Two HAWK Battalions are positioned in I Corps. Six ships with nine TERRIER surface-to-air missile (SAM) launching systems are in the vicinity of the NVN coast. The TALOS equipped cruiser CHICAGO is en route to YANKEE STATION with an estimated time of arrival of 1715 hours, 10 February.

- On 30 January, CINCPAC was authorized to employ TALOS missiles against hostile aircraft south of 20 degrees north over water or over land.

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- On 8 February, in response to CINCPAC's request, authority was granted to employ TERRIER and TARTAR missiles in addition to TALOS in order to significantly improve ship based SAM capability.

- Combat air patrol escort is being provided for B-52s operating in the DMZ or Mu Gia Pass areas.

#### DISCUSSION

- If NVN decides to conduct offensive air operations, a combination of air-to-air and air-to-ground operations is likely. The An-2s and jets would probably be used against diverse targets in order to achieve maximum confusion and the most dramatic psychological and propaganda effects.

- On 7 February, six AN-2s flew to a point about 50 miles south of Vinh and some may have continued to the Tchepone, Laos area. At least five of the planes returned to Hanoi. A sixth probably landed at Vinh. These aircraft could probably fly at low altitude to such locations as Con Tien, Gio Linh, Camp Carroll, Khe Sanh and south of A-Shau, without being detected by radar.

- IL-28 jet bombers on a high altitude mission could reach close to Saigon, and a low level penetration could reach south of Danang and return to Hanoi.

- MIG-21 jet fighters could reach Danang and return to Hanoi.

- MIG-21s have recently been conducting flights into the southern regions of NVN and have, on one occasion, been as far south as Vinh, 100 miles north of the DMZ. In about 10 minutes, a MIG-21 could proceed from Vinh to the DMZ and conduct a high altitude intercept on a B-52. A single, impressive display could be achieved in the shoot-down of a B-52 by a MIG-21. This is a distinct possibility.

- US ships in the Gulf of Tonkin are within range of all NVN aircraft, but would probably be reserved for jet attack. The psychological effect of achieving a degree of damage or destruction to a US naval ship would probably be considered by Hanoi to be worth the risk.

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CONCLUSIONS

- NVN has the capability to conduct offensive air operations against US/Free World forces, if they elect to do so.

- NVN aircraft would probably be used in a manner designed to achieve the maximum psychological effect from the resulting press reports rather than significant damage. Shootdown of a B-52 by a MIG-21 would achieve such results.

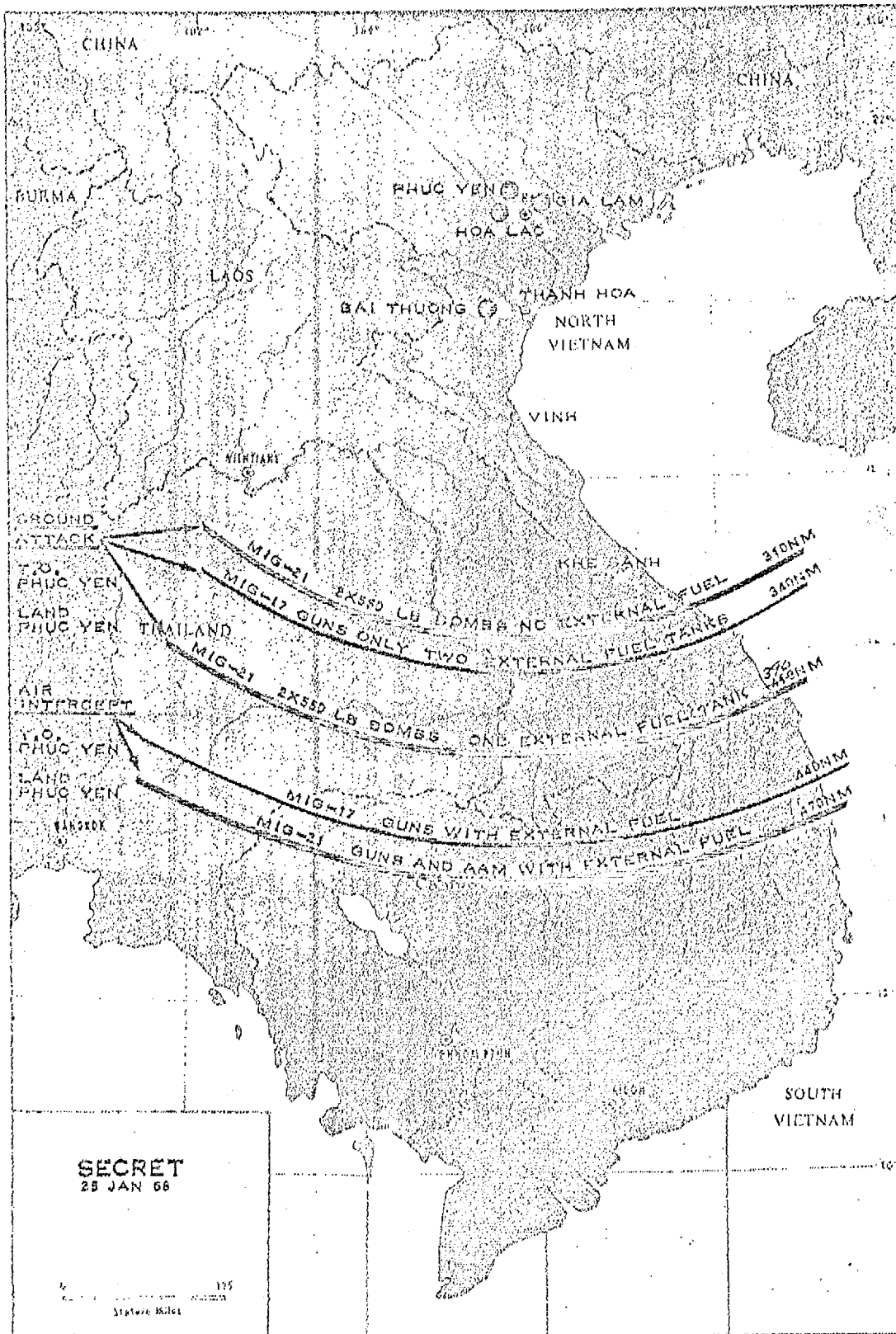
- The return to NVN of IL-28s, the southward excursions of AN-2s and MIG-21s, activities at Vinh and Bai Thuong airfields, and GCI and communications expansion in the lower NVN panhandle, suggest that offensive air operations by NVN are imminent.

- The enemy's best chance of evading the US air defenses system in SVN would be a low level penetration by MIG-21 or IL-28 aircraft, avoiding radar detection. In such instance the IL-28 radius of action from Hanoi would be about 50 miles beyond Danang. MIG-21s could barely reach Danang and return to Hanoi. Such tactics would have a reasonable chance of success.

- A high level IL-28 could reach close to Saigon, and a high level MIG-21 could reach about 100 miles south of Danang, but neither would have much chance of successfully evading US air defenses.

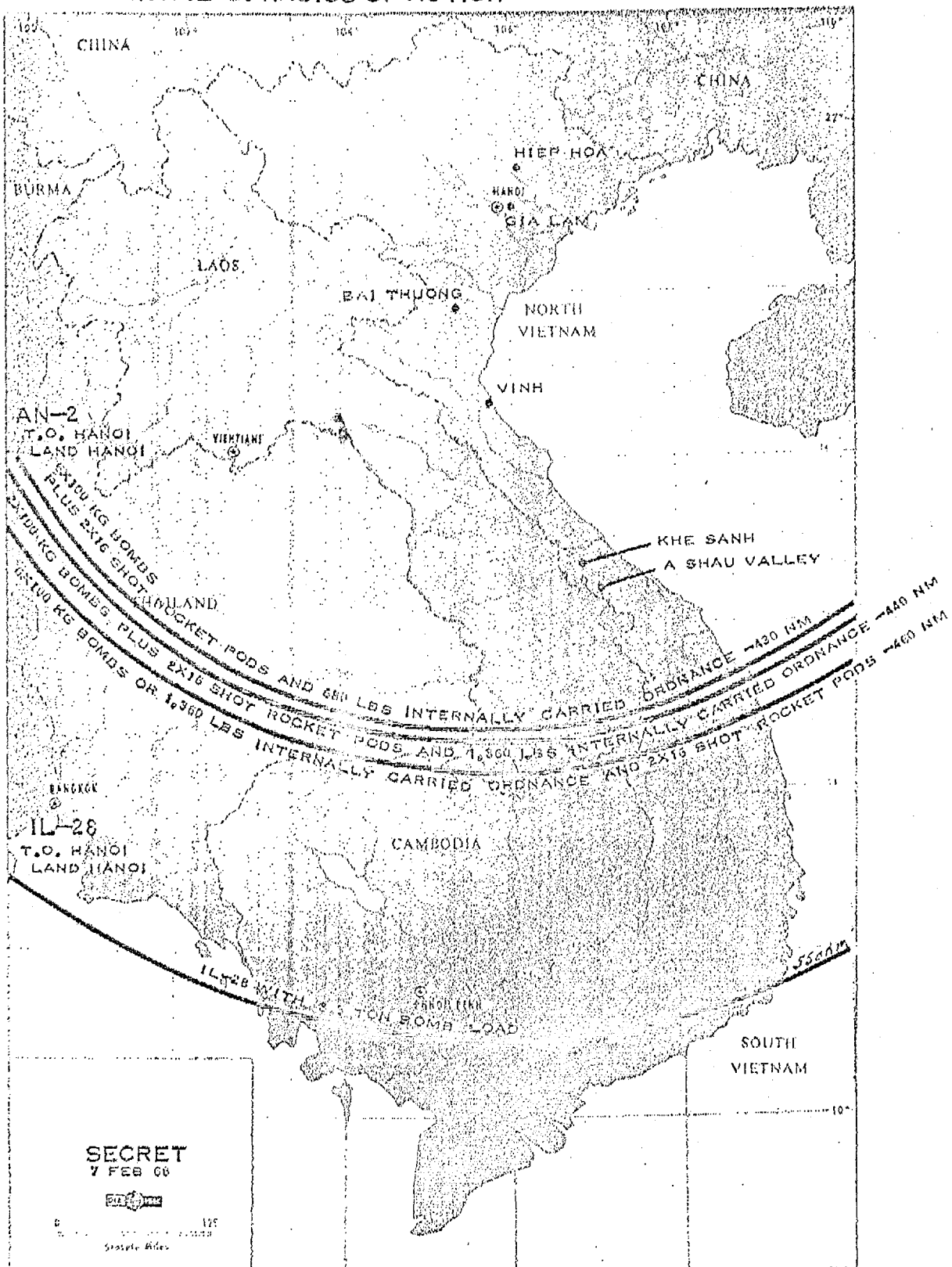
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### NVN MIG RADIUS OF ACTION



TAB E

NVN AN-2 RADIUS OF ACTION (OPTIMUM MISSION)  
NVN IL-28 RADIUS OF ACTION



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